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A return to our former good Old Principles and Practice, the only way to restore and preserve our Peace.

A
SERMON

Preach'd Before the
Univerfity of OXFORD,
At St. *MART*'s,
On Sunday, *May* the 14th 1710.

By *WILLIAM TILLY*, B.D. Fellow of *C.C.C. Oxon.*
Rector of *Wightam* near *Oxford*: And Domestick
Chaplain to The Right Honourable the *EARL* of
ABINGDON.

With a Letter to Dr. *Sacheverell*.

The Fourth Edition.

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A
LETTER
TO
Dr. *SACHEVERELL*.

SIR,
I Send you this Discourse, and this Letter with it, as you are my Friend; and as an Instance of my hearty Acknowledgments, and my Thanks to you, in particular, for the Honour and Reputation of Integrity you have restored to your own Order of the Clergy, once more; and the great Service you have done your Church and Country by your good Example; and by your prudent, couragious, and religious Defence of those Doctrines, that were once the Opinions of all the wise and honest Men in England: and which, by the Assistance you have given that way, and the good Disposition that appears of late in the People of this Kingdom towards them, we may hope to find so once agen.

But whatever Exceptions some Men might take against your Doctrine, so very unseasonable, it must be own'd, in this loose and degenerate Age, 'twas to my greatest Surprise, that any should attempt a Stain upon your Moral Character; which we all know here to be so very Worthy, and no one more than myself: For I may be bold to say, no Man living is better furnish'd with Evidence to the Contrary of what these Men have so Slanderously reported, than
I am;

A Letter to Dr. Sacheverell.

I am ; having had my early Education with you, and immediately next to you, from my very Childhood, in the first Rudiments of Learning ; and ever since, very near you, in the same excellent University (of which we are both at present Members) and by this means an entire and thorow Acquaintance with your Person, Inclinations, and Deportment, throughout every Period of your Life. Your Character therefore, as to this point, I am sure ought to have been as free from Censure as any Man's ; and indeed would have been so, if the Poison of some Men's Tongues, that flows from the Gall of Bitterness, and ill Principles in their Hearts ever yet had suffer'd, or ever could, any thing that is truly good and excellent to escape them.

I need not attest your constant and laborious Diligence in your Studies, and that you never had any thing, besides your Duty, more at Heart than your Improvement in useful Learning ; these things, Sir, are too well known for me to mention them. And as for your private and more secret Life, I, that was so often with you, know it to be such, as your Enemies could never imitate, and therefore ought not to have defam'd. That strict Vertue, and Sobriety, together with the greatest Easiness, Sprightliness, and Vigor in your Conversation ; that brave Presence of Mind and Spirit, at all times, in Opposing any thing that was Dishonest, that ingenuous Openness and Frankness of Temper, that true Christian Simplicity, and perfect Disinterestedness and Freedom from all base and selfish Designs, I have always observ'd and loved in you, as often as I have seen your Person. Your Gratitude to your former greatest Benefactors I have
heard

A Letter to Dr. Sacheverell.

heard them mention themselves, to their entire Satisfaction in you. The constant and most generous Honour, you have always pay'd to your Good Mother, She did me the Favour to acquaint me with, her Self, with the tenderest Expressions of Affection for you. And yet these are the very Points wherein you have been most reflected on, with not the least Reason, and therefore with the greatest Slander. So very luckily for you, have your Enemies been mistaken, though to their own lasting Shame and Reproach, amongst all that know you: I am sorry that worthy Person, your Mother (for whom I have the greatest Respect) could not escape her share of unjust Reproach with you, and for your Sake, as these Men maliciously intended: And for which they have more to answer, than they think of, if God hear the Cries of the injur'd Widow, as he tells us himself he does, and will surely vindicate her. But that's no Argument with this sort of Men, they never think of God, or Religion, or their own Duty, or how they break it.

These things, Sir, I know to be true, upon the best Evidence a Man can have of any thing, my own Experience: And these things you must give me leave to speak openly to the World, in your behalf, because I could not be your Friend in concealing them at this time; and if I should say, I did not know them to be true, I should be a Liar, somewhat like those, that have so much traduc'd and injur'd you.

'Tis a matter of sad Consideration in the mean time, and the greatest Discouragement to Vertue and Industry that can be, that the best Man's Character is thus far liable to be traduc'd and misrepresented by the worst. And that after a Man has
spent

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Spent great part of his Life in the most laborious and painful Studies, to qualify himself for the Service of God and his Church, he still lies so much at the mercy of Scurrilous Tongues and Pens, for the good effect of all, and may chance to have the influence of all, in a great measure, disappointed by one malignant blast of these ill Men's corrupt and slanderous Breath.

But we may thank God, you are now as much above the reach of these Men's Malice, as you have always exceeded them in your good Life and Principles. I heartily wish the continuance of your Happiness, and shall rejoyce in your Honour as my own; and hope, that in this time of your Silence, there will not be wanting others, who shall dare Preach and Defend the common Doctrines of Christianity, for which you have stood: And I have no distrust, but that the Great Master whom we serve, and who has hitherto delivered you, will yet deliver, and preserve, both You and Me, and all that love and maintain his holy Truth, against all the Malice and Designs of Men, unto his heavenly Kingdom.

2 Cor. 1.
10.
2 Tim. 4.
18.

I am, S I R,

Your most Affectionate Friend,

and Servant,

Oxon. C. C. C.

June 7th,

1710.

WILLIAM TILLY.

JEREMIAH VI. 16.

Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your Souls:—

THESE words, we see, are deliver'd in God's own immediate *Name*, as well as by his *Authority*, to the Nation of the Jews; and intimate to us the exceeding greatness of *Corruption*, that had grown amongst that People, in that they here express the Remedy for it, with so much address of Affection and Concern: *Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way*, implying that they were quite out of the way, at present, and had been so for a long season; and that it was now a matter of no less difficulty in it self, than of moment and importance to their happiness, to *reduce* and set them right. And therefore 'tis, we find God here by the Prophet applies himself to them in terms of such pathetical earnestness; that he sets all their *Activity* to work, and employs their utmost force of enquiry, in search after the Truth, from which they were gone off; and were now by an inveterate depravation, both in Knowledge and Practice, quite grown stiff in Error, and, as it seems, hardly to be recover'd. That they were so indeed, we need no farther evidence, than to look back to the three former Verses before my Text: Where the Prophet *sadly* complains of an universal Degeneracy in all Orders and Degrees of Men, and almost a total Forfeiture of the Primitive *Integrity* of their Religion. In the 13th Verse he tells them, and us, that from
the

the least of them even to the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely: Their Laity, it seems, from the Peasant to the Noble-Man, were wholly set upon corrupt Practices of Oppression, Fraud, and Bribery; and the Church-Men themselves had given too much occasion, and countenance to these Sins of the People, by their own Example and Authority; by soothing great and bad Men in their Vices, for their own private Ends and Ambition; and by taking all opportunities to assure them there was no Danger, when they were just upon the very edge of Ruine: For so it follows, Verse 14th, They, that is, the Priests and Prophets, have heal'd also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, peace, peace, when there was no peace: Telling them, that all was safe and flourishing, and that to follow the Courses and Principles they were engag'd in at present, was the only true way to settle the Nation, and secure the Interest both of publick and private Happiness; for so much, I think, the repetition of the word Peace may very well import to us.

And yet as bad as we see they were, and are assur'd by God's own Authority they were, they had not the least sense or feeling of it; not so much modesty left them, as to acknowledge they had ever been in the wrong; And tho' the Prophet by his Threatnings thunder'd in their Ears, and remonstrated against them in God's Name never so loudly, yet there was no coming at them; they had not the least resentment either of their Sin or Danger; their Principles were so quite perverted, their Apprehension strongly barr'd against all Reproof, and their Attention quite retir'd and lull'd in the deepest Security. For were they asham'd, that is, both People and Priests together, when they had committed Abomination? Nay, they

Verse 15. were not at all asham'd, neither could they blush.

*To such a wretched state were things reduc'd, that there was hardly any Foundation remaining,
any*

any good *Old Principles* enough left amongst that People, to reform them on. He that would make them better, must begin with them entirely anew, quite rip up and unravel their present inbred settled Notions of *Good* and *Evil*, and implant even the very first original Seeds of Vertue and Goodness in their Souls. So much indeed as this they stood in need of, and 'tis no less than this, that God himself directs them to, in the former part of my Text: *Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein;* that is, put an immediate stop to all your present Proceedings, for every step, you take *now*, is out of the way, go back to the place from whence you first set out; and since there are so many *ways* of Sin and Error, and but one of Truth, stand a while at the Head of all these *Paths*, and consider with your selves the extreme danger of mistaking, and that 'tis a point of infinite Concernment to you, that you determine your selves to the right: *Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your Souls.*

What was the Consequence and Issue of this Advice, we may see at the latter end of *this*, and the following Verse; but that is not my present Business to consider.

From the Words I have *now* read before you, I think these *Four* following Observations do very naturally arise.

First, That God here by his Prophet puts that People upon so very strict and diligent a search and enquiry for the Truths of Religion, argues an entire Corruption and Apostacy in the main Body of that Nation, from the true Knowledge and Practice of their Duty: That they had even lost the very first *Elements* of Vertue, and were perfectly at a *stand* and *puzzled*, to find out the *good old* Rules and Principles of Duty, by which their *Forefathers*, for so

many Ages, had so happily guided and govern'd their Steps: *Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way.*

Secondly, We may observe the Matter and Subject of all this Enquiry here enjoyn'd them, the Old Truths and Principles of Religion, to which the Prophet here directs them; under which Head I think it will not be unnecessary to shew what advantage of Argument the former prevailing *Authority* and *Antiquity* of a Religious Doctrine has, to its being sound and good above any *new-stamp'd modern Pretences* whatsoever; *See and ask for the old paths, where is the good way.*

Thirdly, We have here the proper End, and what ought to be the true Design of all our Enquiries and Discoveries in Religion, the right Government of our Lives and Practice by its Rules and Precepts: *See and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.*

Fourthly, We see here the blessed Event and Consequence of such a Course propos'd; and what good Effects so *desirable a return*, both in Knowledge and Practice, would work for any People; a *restitution* of them from under their present deplorable distracted State, to their former happy Days, and quiet Enjoyment of Themselves and Country: That this is the *only* method to save them from their Ruine, and that nothing else will do it: *See and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your Souls.*

And, *First*, that God here by his Prophet puts that People upon so very strict and diligent a Search and Enquiry after the Truth, argues an entire Corruption and Revolt, in the great Body of that Nation, from the true Knowledge and Practice of Religion; that they had lost the very *Elements* and first Principles of Vertue, and were perfectly at a stand and puzzled to find out the good *old* Laws and Rules
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of Duty, which their Forefathers had so long, and so happily profess'd, and acted by. We find the Holy *Prophets* often lamenting the dismal Effects of a National Ignorance in Matters of Religion; and that Men's Minds were grown into such a *rust*, by not attending to the Light of Truth, or had contracted so perverse a *bent*, by acting contrary to it, that they could not tell how to take hold of them by any *application* whatsoever, nor knew where to begin their first *Instructions*; *Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine?* says *Isaiah* 28. 9, 10. *Isaiah, them that are wean'd from the milk, and drawn from the breast*; intimating to us, that hardly any of those of riper Years were capable of good Impressions, by reason of an old Stubborn Indisposition they were under, from former Errors and Prejudices. And that even amongst those, who were in the best and nearest Preparation to this purpose, yet there was no small *difficulty* to be expected by the *Man* that should go about to teach them Knowledge, on the account of their Weakness and Incapacity to receive it. *For precept*, says the same Prophet, *must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little*, the same Instructions repeated over and over, and broken into minute and small portions, for fear of choaking or overcharging their Apprehension. And this general *Apostacy* from the Truth, this Night of Ignorance, that spread it self over *Judah* and *Jerusalem*, where yet the Law of God had publick Authority, and prevail'd, at least in the open profession of it, was yet so very great, that it had *wrapt* every Order and Distinction of Men under its *gloomy covert*; as we are assur'd by the Prophet *Jeremy* in other places, besides the Chapter of my Text. In *one*, he had observ'd the gross Ignorance, *Jerem. 5.* and corruption of Manners that prevail'd amongst 4. 5. the *common People*, and was *weary* to see it: He *Is. 1. 14.* makes the best excuse for them however that he could, and says, *Surely these are poor, they are foolish,*

for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God; that is, they had not those Opportunities, on account of the meanness of their Fortunes and Condition, to attain to any great Knowledge in the Affairs of Religion, that lay so quite beside their common and ordinary Conversation. But from Men of Birth and Quality, and Capacity and Opportunities of Learning, he expected other matters, as he tells us himself: I will get me unto the great Men, says he, and will Speak unto them, for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God; that is, they very well might and should have known it: But what account does he return us of these Men? why, that these had altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds; tho' they knew the Laws of God, and their Duty better than most other Men did, yet they look'd upon them as too great Restraints and Confinements on their Liberty, and disdain'd, and were impatient to get loose from under the Yoke and Obligation. And because there was no other way for them to be easy under these Resolutions, and this Temper of Mind, than either not to think at all of Religion, or to bring themselves to a stubborn disbelief of it; for that reason, and from what we see some Men of their Posterity and Quality follow at this day, we may easily guess what Methods they took in order to so very Honourable a Design.

We see then, how great a swerving and declension there was from the Truth of Religion, both in the Principles and Manners of Men, in the Jewish Church and Nation, at the time, when God thought it necessary, by the Power of his Spirit in his Prophet *Jeremiah*, to stir up and awaken the Sense of the Kingdom, by his bold and resolute protesting against the Vices and Corruptions of the Times he liv'd in; in whatsoever Order or Character of Men they were found, whether in Church or State. And this he went on to do, notwithstanding their defiance of his

Authority, their secret Threats or more open Combinations against his Person, or any Pains or Dangers he sustain'd at their Hands in the steady prosecution of his Duty. For to that purpose indeed, God had some time before prepar'd and Strengthen'd him when he gave him his Prophetical Commission, at his very entrance on his Office; as we read in the first Chapter of his Prophecy, 17, 18, and 19th Verses: *Thou therefore gird up thy loins, says God to him, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismay'd at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For behold I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land; against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the Land. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.* And so we are sure he has always been, and, we may depend upon it, ever will be, with those his faithful Servants, who shall dare maintain his Cause, the Cause of Truth and Right, at the expence of their own present Ease, Interest and Safety, whatever secret or open Counsel of wicked Men, may rise against them, ^{Psal. 64. 2,} or howsoever any powerful Combination of Worldly Politicians may contrive to overthrow them.

And as long as every Church and Kingdom is liable to the same Disorders and moral Distempers, in the Frame and Constitution of it, that we are sure, the Jewish labour'd under: As long as there may be Reasons of State and Government, or present Safety, that may seem to make it necessary sometimes, that there should be a wry Turn given to the Principles of Religion, by a sort of Men who have Themselves before acted contrary to it; and who would be otherwise very Uneasy, and sling about them with Impatience, if Religion should be kept up in its pure genuine Truth and Lustre, to their utter Shame and Condemnation; As long as Men of little, or no Religion them-

themselves, in point of *Principles*, and of loose and *profligate Lives*, in point of *Practice*, may have it in their Power to joyn their mutual Assistance to encourage one another, and to corrupt the rest of the World, and to run down and discountenance the *Truth of God*, and the *Professors* of it: *As long* as most Men's secular Advantages may lie at the controul and disposal of others, *that mind their own things only*, and are not heartily affected to the Interests of Religion: *As long* as these things may be so; *so long* we are sure the *Church of God* must be in *Danger* of general, grievous, and disastrous Corruptions; and *so long*, there will always need some Men of *shining Piety*, of a *sublime* and *generous* Zeal for the Honour of God and Religion, who shall dare *appear*, be able to *oppose*, and effectually give a *Stand* to the Torrent of Iniquity, which is ready to *overwhelm* the Age: and without such Men, we may hope and pray, that God will never leave his Church, in the times of her Destitution, and Calamity, whensoever they shall happen: Such *true sons of our Holy Mother the Church*, of her own *bringing up*, and *nursing* by her *side*, *that have been dandled upon her knees*, and *suck'd the breasts* of her purest Doctrine, that, in the day of her Enemies, shall *own* her, shall *take her by the hand*, be her true *Support* in *Weakness*; *guide* and *direct* her to the means of her Recovery, and lead her in the ways of Truth and Peace. Which brings me to my *Second* Observation from the Text.

Phil. 2. 21.

Isaiah 66. 11, 12.

Isa. 51. 18.

Namely, The *method* the Holy Prophet here prescribes to the *Jewish Church* and Nation, for a remedy for all those *fatal Disorders* they were under; and what was to be the great subject Matter of all their Search and Enquiries, to wit, the *old Truths* and Principles of Religion; *Stand in the ways*, and *see*, and *ask for the old paths*, *where is the good way*. Under which Head I cannot but think it necessary to consider, what advantage of Argument, the former prevailing *Authority*, and *Antiquity* of a Doctrine of Religion has, to its

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its being found and good: for so we find both *Characters* here joyn'd together by the Holy Prophet, *See and ask for the old paths, where is the good way.*

Not that all ways are good which are Old, neither; for then Idolatry might claim a right of *Prescription*, in comparison of what has been Since, to be the *Religion* of the World; it having continued longer, and with less Interruption in most parts of the Earth, and made a more Universal Spread than any one at present. And yet we know that the *true worship* of God, takes place even of *that*, in point of *Antiquity*, and was deriv'd down, *through one line* at least, from the *Creation* of the World to the Flood; and from thence to *Abraham the Father of the Faithful*, in whose Family it took up its perpetual abode, till *the fulness of time was come*, at the appearance of our blessed Saviour. So that still we see that the *good paths* of Duty are the *oldest* too, and have the Precedence in point of Time, as well as of Perfection. And since the Reformation of the World, by the Gospel of our Lord, we must date the *Truth* and *Authority* of Religion from the *Antiquity* of it; because 'tis impossible that any *Doctrine* or *Precept* of Religion should be true, that was not at first deliver'd by *Christ* and *his Apostles*, and maintain'd by the first and purest Ages of the Church. And therefore all other more modern Pretences, how *enlightening* soever they may seem, are but Innovations of Men of *corrupt Minds*, ^{2 Tim. 3. 8.} and base Interests, Sway'd by their Pride, or Passion, or Lust, or Humour to wrest, and pervert, and *barter* the Word of God, in order to raise themselves a ^{2 Corin. 2.} *Character*, or to *flatter* and *comply* with other Men's ^{17.} *Vices*, thereby to procure their own *Advancement*. Such are all those novel Expositions of the Articles of our Church and Holy Faith, that have appear'd of late amongst us; which speak in a language unknown to *Antiquity*, which *break up* the *old Foundations*, and put the Strength of Christianity upon the *Sandy bottom* of new, weak, subtile and trifling *Ar-*
gu-

guments, which serve only to betray it ; That, under a pretence of late Improvements, and a more perfect way of *Reasoning*, have endeavour'd to Slurr and Slight the Doctrines of our Religion, and Mysteries of our Faith, which stand upon the Authority of God Himself.

But where is now that *Beauty of Holiness*, that *primitive venerable Simplicity* of Religion, under which *Christianity* appear'd, in Times of *Old*, adorn'd like a *reverend Matron*, with a *native Strength* and *Grace*, inimitable by all the Tricks and Refinements of these *Gentlemen of Reason* ! But now we have her trimm'd like a *strange woman*, in the attire of a *harlot*, painted with false Colours, and dress'd in all the wantonness of Men's extravagant *Schemes* and *Fancies* ; sunk from that *Reverence* and *Dignity*, by which she once struck an awful Love upon the Eyes of all that beheld her ; and made now basely to serve with men's sins, and to truckle under their unrighteous Designs and vicious Interests. Take but the *Church of England*, as it stood from the first Days of *Queen Elizabeth*, till about the Death of *Charles the Martyr*, and how unlike Her self does she now appear ! That Her primitive Fathers and Pastors would not know Her ; the Strength and Sinews of Her *Discipline* so broken, the pure Fountains of Her Doctrine so polluted, so many of those who attend Her Altars, and act in Her sacred Rites and Mysteries, so utterly gone off, and estrang'd in their Principles from Her ; and going so directly counter to Her Tenets, and dearest Safety in their Practice ! But if ever we would again be a wise and happy People, 'tis thither we must return from whence we are fallen ; *Antiquam exquirite matrem* :
Virgil. Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths,
Æn. 3. where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls——

It ought in reason to be one Objection with us against any Doctrine or Interpretation in Points of Religion, that 'tis New ; that 'twas never broach'd before

before, nor receiv'd in any *Churches of the Saints*; that we can see no clear undoubted Authority for it in the Word of God; That the Passages alledg'd thence to confirm it are *dubious*, or appear in its Favour *forc'd* and *violent*; That Men may have present Designs of their own to serve by it; and that the *Corruptions* of the Times we live in may give too much Countenance to it, and have made it perhaps *beneficial*, or almost *necessary* to be advanc'd, in order to take off the Reproach and Scandal of former Practices, or to justify the Iniquity of the *present*: These are the Exceptions that any new Doctrines and Expositions in Religion are justly liable to; and therefore without the clearest Reason in the World, no wise Man would easily entertain them; there being so great an hazard in doing so, (especially when they appear *against*, as well as *without* the Authority of ancient Times) whatever seeming *Subtilties* or *Niceties* of *Argumentation* may be made use of by Men of Parts to support and promote them.

But now the primitive Truths of Religion carry a *plainness* and *veneration* in their Face; have good *Reason*, as well as the best *Authority* to shew for them; are not wrapt up in, nor to be drawn out of, the *thin Cobwebs* of *School* Distinctions; not intricate and intangled with Difficulties and Perplexities, that *witty* Men may make, and *wise* Men do not care to answer; but they are easy and level to common Apprehension; being intended by the Mercy and Goodness of Almighty God for the general Benefit and Happiness of Mankind; so that *he that runs may read them, and the wayfaring Man, though a fool, cannot err therein.* Isai. 35. 8.

I do not say, that the *newness* of any Doctrine is a sufficient Reason why Men should immediately reject it, unless it carries an open Absurdity in it, and a plain Inconsistence with the *Analogy* of Faith. But 'tis certainly one of the *best Reasons* in the World for our *Caution*, and utmost Examination of it; and that we take care we are not fond of embracing it, out of an *itch* and humour of *Novelty*; till we see much better Arguments for it, than we are sure there are against it; especially when the

whole weight of Authority leans quite on the other side of the Question. And if it comes with no better Authority than of the Men that first advance it; and does not bring with it indisputable Reason, to balance the Authority of our own excellent Church, the primitive Church, and all the best Churches in the World; he, that shall then demand other Men's Submission to his Doctrine of this nature, only shews the greatness of his own *Modesty*, and may, no doubt, expect to meet with a suitable Entertainment from the World.

And yet we know, how by the cunning and *artful* Sophistry of a late Writer, (whose Name is deservedly *Odious* amongst good Men) and his vain and empty Appearance of close Reasoning, upon a wrong and rotten Foundation, one of the *principal* Doctrines of *Christianity*, and of the *Church of England*, has been shaken; and almost subverted: had not the Good Providence of God stepp'd in to prevent it, in a great measure, by the Sufferings of *Another*; *Sufferings*, somewhat like those the Doctrine it self teaches, and like those, by which it was at first promoted in the early Preachers of the Gospel.

But this comes of that proud conceited Humour, that fulness of Spirit, that prevails so much of late, in one Sort of Men; and from their Setting up only for themselves, and rejecting all manner of Authority whatsoever they don't like; that is, all the *Opinions* of *all the wise and good Men* in the World, even of the Church of God it self, and relying only on their own *shallow, empty, bloated* Reason. By which means, some of these admir'd Gentlemen run into downright Heresy; others have entertain'd such a *Latitude* in Opinions: others, such a sett of *odd, singular, separating Notions*, as are both to their own great Unhappiness, and odious and offensive to all the World, besides themselves.

These Men tell us, they will take nothing upon *Authority*; I wish they would not in some cases, and then we should not so often see them follow others, as they now do, with no better Reason. But is the *Authority* of the *Church of God* in all former Ages, and the present, nothing? Are the Opinions of all the wise and good Men
that

that have been in the World before us to be rejected, because these Men were not the first Inventors of them? If an Opinion of the Church, universally receiv'd in former and present Times, had not much Reason otherwise on its side, yet if it had no Reason to shew in the least *against* it; that I am sure a modest and ingenuous Man would think a very good Reason *for* it; (I am sure the *Apostle* thought so in this case) at least, it is a *Reason*, why a Man should not pertly, and forwardly, and impudently Oppose it; and betray his own want of Sense and Modesty, by running so directly cross to that of all Mankind besides.

1 Cor. II. 16.

Authority, 'tis true, must never prevail *against* clear Reason, let it be never so ancient; but when there is no Reason *against* a Doctrine, and (which is our case) the best Reason in the World *for* it, and the whole *Stream* of *Antiquity* flowing in to us besides, he, that does not satisfy himself to believe as other Men do in this case, whatever specious Pretences he may make, does not so much intend to *improve*, as to *perplex* and intangle the Truth; nor does he really discover his Charity to Mankind, by venting and propagating his new, raw, indigested Notions, but his *Pride*, and *Singularity*, and Conceitedness of his own Reason. I have stay'd too long on this point, tho' I am sensible, it was never more necessary and seasonable than at present.

I come now to my *Third* Observation from the Words of my Text, what is the proper *End*, and ought to be the true Design of all our Enquiries and Discoveries in Religion, the right Government of our Lives and Practice by its Rules and Precepts, when we are once rightly inform'd of them in our Minds and Judgments: *See and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein:* For without this, our Knowledge is our Reproach, and good Principles the greatest marks of shame we can carry about us; rendring our *Faults* and *Miscarriages* the more *Notorious*, our *Persons* *inexcusable*, and our *Characters* *inconsistent*. Without this, how *high flown* soever we may be in our Professions, how Zealous soever in our Protestations, how active soever in our Prosecutions of

an honest Cause, we are yet still but *Hypocrites* in *disguise*, and do our excellent Church and Religion more real *Disgrace* and *Disservice*, by the Looseness of our Example, than we can do it good by all our Interest, our Places, our Power, or Authority.

Don't we see, by a *late* Instance, how ready Prophanes and Atheistical Men are, (as they have always been) to stain and slur a *good Cause* it self, by endeavouring to fix an immoral, tho' undeserv'd Character, on the Person that appear'd in the Defence and Support of it; by translating their own Sins and real Shame on a *Man* so much better than Themselves. In which malicious Design of theirs, we know, and may thank God, they were so happily mistaken this time, and hope they will always be so, in any other case of a like nature, as well as in the Success of all their own ill Designs at all times. But still we must own, these Men were very much in the right in the general (however mistaken in the particular Application) that the nearest and most probable way to cast a foul *aspersion* and *blot* on a good Cause is to weaken the *good Opinion*, and to sink the *Authority* of those that are concern'd in its Defence, by reflecting on their *Morals*. And if so, *what manner of Persons then ought we to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness*, not knowing how soon we may be call'd to answer for the Truths of our Religion before *Men*; and, we may be sure, not long after, at the *awful Tribunal* of *God*, the Judge of all Men, for the Scandal we shall otherwise have given to Religion, by our careless or profligate Demeanour.

Surely a warm, zealous, lewd, vicious *Church of England Man*, is one of the greatest Contradictions in the World. To hear a Man talk loosely and prophanely, swear and blaspheme, and at the same time Vow that he will *stand* by the Church's Cause as long as he lives, when he is ready to *fall* by his own Intemperance, is a thing so nauseous, that a Man must be past all *sense* and *apprehension* himself, that does not think his Company has *enough* left to take notice of it, and be offended at it; and if he knows they may be so, can he offer a greater
affront

affront to their Conversation? For God's Sake *then*, for the Sake of our *Holy Religion*, for *our own* Sake, for our *Enemies* Sake, let us cut off this Handle, at least, from them that Hate us, and prevent all Exceptions, of this sort however, against our selves. Let us endeavour to answer the Purity and Holiness of our Principles and Profession, by the Regularity and Exactness of our Manners. This God, we see, expects from us as the true end and issue of all our Studies and Improvements in Knowledge; and this we must do, if ever we intend to be really useful to our Country, or find any true Quiet, or well grounded Satisfaction at home, within our own Breasts and Consciences. From whence I pass to my

Fourth and Last Observation from the Text, What would be the blessed End and Consequence of such a Course, and what good Effects such a desirable *Return*, both in *Knowledge* and *Practice*, would work for us, a restitution of us from under our present deplorable distracted State, to our former happy Days and peaceful Enjoyment of our Selves and Country; that this is the only method to save us from our Ruine, and that nothing else will do it: *See, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls.* If ever we desire to be a free and happy People, the *Truth*, as our Blessed Saviour tells John 8. 32. us, *must make us so*; Ignorance and Error, Disquiet and Perplexity being inseparable Companions; the former filling either the publick or private state of Man, wherever they reside, with the latter, with Disorder and Confusion, and every thing that is Evil. *There is no peace,* Isai. 57. 20. *saieth my God, to the wicked*; and again, *the wicked are* ^{21.} *like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.* A Man under the possession of perverse and reprobate Principles is in a violent state, carried by a wrong *biass*, and can never be easy, either to himself or others. All *Error* is a *restless* and *turbulent* thing, perpetually working in the *lees*, and always changing and shifting from one Point of the Compass to another, because it can find no fix'd Central rest in any one. Whereas *Truth* is ever *regular*, and *congenial* with, and
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sits easy upon the Mind of Man; and where-ever 'tis, it convinces, clears, calms and cherishes the Heart, on which it *shines*. But these are but *wide* and *general* Considerations. Let us now survey these Truths *exemplified* in particular, in the Publick State: Where we may see how mistaken and wrong Notions, in Religion or Politicks, *quite ravish the Spheres of Government*, and *put them into a preternatural course*; tending continually to *disturb* and *overturn* what is already settled, and being able to *produce* and *establisb* nothing.

When, *once*, our own happy Government, both in Church and State, were at *first* violently *shock'd*, and *then* push'd from their ancient *basis*, by the Roughness and Rebellion of those Times, the *genuine* Issue of those ill Principles some amongst us maintain at present; what Peace and Quiet was then in our Land? was not *War* and *Strife* perpetually in our *Gates*? Could a Man go out, or come in with Safety? A Spirit of *Rout* and *Confusion* stalk'd up and down our Country, and *Ruine* and *Desolation* attended by its side! Religion and Liberty were the universal cry; but was there any thing *left* to be found amongst us? Every Man almost had his different Religion, and all of them in the wrong; and hardly any Man had the same a Month together: till Men were grown quite Sick and Giddy with *Revolutions* (which is the usual Effect of them indeed) and knew not *where* they *stood*, nor *what* they would be *changing* to. And shall we trust those dangerous *Tenets* again, and let the Folds of the *old Serpent* wind about us once more, till he has us *fast*, and may hurry us into Ruine?

Men may *fancy*, may *protest*, may *declare* what they please, that there is no *Danger*; but if a true and genuine Cause never fails to produce its Effect, when all Circumstances requisite for acting are in the way; we may then depend upon it, that those *Seditious*, *Republican*, *Atheistical*, *Impious*, Notions, that have been so much of late *broach'd*, *promoted*, and *encourag'd* in our Land, are a *ferment* lay'd within our Bowels, which when once it has *spread*, and *wrought* it self to a *head*, must break out to the *endangering* our whole State, if not to our final Ruine.

Yet

Yet we don't seem to be apprehensive of all this, and are angry with those that would awaken us into a sense of it! Under all these Weaknings and Diminutions of our happy Establishment, we *fold our hands together, and cry peace, peace, when there is no peace*; and the *gray hairs* of our decay are here and there upon us, and we do not, we will not know it. But, * *O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!* what the end of these things will be, what it must be, without a timely Return to our first Principles of Religion and Loyalty, to a true Knowledge and Practice of our Duty!

'Tis certain we are strangely gone off from our *first love* to our Holy Mother the *Church of England*; and are *slidden back by a perpetual backsliding* for many Years together, encouraging one another, and comforting our selves in running down and disparaging those excellent Doctrines of our Religion, upon which our main Security depends; upon which the Reign and Safety of our Most Excellent Sovereign, The *QUEEN* (whom God for ever Bless and Prosper) *the Anointed of the Lord, the Breath of our Nostrils*, and the Welfare of all Her Kingdoms is supported.

Would any one have been bold to say, a few years since? that we should have liv'd to see a *Doctrine* of Christianity, I mean that of *Non-resistance* to the supreme Power; a *Doctrine* authoriz'd and acknowledg'd for Divine by the constant Practice and Preaching of the primitive Church; and from thence deriv'd down to our own Times through many Ages, without Dispute amongst those that held the † Truth; wrought into our own *Establishment* as a *strengthening* to the whole, enacted by the *legal Authority of England*; declar'd, acknowledg'd, and confirm'd by both our *Learned Universities*, yet to see this very *Doctrine* *spurn'd at and flouted*, by those Men, who say too, they have some Religion; to see it rejected by its *former Friends and Patrons*; to see it dragg'd out to its *Condemnation*, with Shame and

* This is the true Interpretation of that place in Moses Song.

† For that the contrary *Doctrine* is Popish and Fanatical, see Dr. Falkner in his *Christian Loyalty*. Book 2. Chap. 1. Sect. 2. Paragr. 9, 10, 11.

Contempt by its Enemies, and censur'd as a Principle dangerous and *damnable*; If this be not something of a *Change* from what we were once, when or how shall we know there is any? or by what Signs or Tokens can we find it?

And yet this *Perfection* in *Revolt* we came to, by *gentle* and *leisurely* Measures; first, by *breaking* in upon our Rules a *little*, as the *exigency* of times seem'd to make it *necessary*; but at first we were *modest*: in the next place by extenuating, then by justifying our Faults, and then by condemning, and censuring, and rejecting the Law it self, against which we had offended.

The Measures, by which a *former* unfortunate Prince lost his *Throne* and Kingdoms, at *first* were *Abdication*: Now they tell us 'twas **Resistance*; and in time, I suppose, some Men may have the Confidence to *call* and *own* it by *another* Name——.

* The Speeches that go under the Names of the Bishops of Sarum and Oxford.

Thus we find we are *unravell'd* by degrees, our Doctrines struck at, one after another; the *threads* of our Constitution *pick'd* out, one by one, and the Principles of our Government *unhing'd*. And if our *kind* Enemies go on a little farther, we may be *quite chang'd* in time, and become *as they* are (which is as *bad* as possible) before we are *aware* of it, or almost sensible of the several steps and degrees of our Alteration.

But by God's Grace and Mercy let us endeavour to preserve, with a just Zeal and Concern, what we have, and try to recover what is lost. Let us, in the *words*, and according to the *Advice* of the Holy Ghost to the Church of *Sardis*, upon a like occasion; According to Rev. 3.2,3. the counsel of that *All-seeing* Spirit, *that knows our works that we have a name that we live, and yet are dead; Let us be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die; for our works are not found perfect before God.*

God of his infinite Mercy grant, That we may know those things that belong to our peace, before they are for ever hid from our eyes, for Jesus Christ his sake, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascrib'd all Praise, Honour, Power, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.



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